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Exploit Your Brand To The Fullest

By Marcia Yudkin

A brand goes beyond a company name and tagline. It is a complete personality or set of values, sometimes even a story line, along with repeated visual, auditory and behavioral elements. When you decide to invest in creating a brand, follow these guidelines to ensure that you get your money's worth:

1. Be distinctive. You'll land your company in expensive legal hot water if you attempt to steal or encroach on another company's identity. Apart from legalities, you tend to get the most bang for your branding buck when you generate a powerful contrast with competitors' images. Do something different.

Smartfood popcorn's glossy black bags still stand out on store shelves as few other food products do. And what macaroni-and-cheese maker besides Annie's offers free "Be Green" bumper stickers and information about the company mascot, a real rabbit named Bernie, on the packaging?

2. Repeat, repeat, repeat! The more times your slogans, logo, stories, colors, themes, values and other elements come before your intended public, the greater their effect. Normally, if you have XXXXX dollars to spend this year spreading awareness of your brand, you're better off creating thousands of small impressions than spending it all on one blow-out event.

Think of the radio and TV ads that sing in your head while you're trying to concentrate on something else. No matter how catchy those tunes, they wouldn't do that if you heard them only once. The same goes for the world's most creative bank logo. When prospective customers also see that image on magnets at their friends' houses, on tote bags at the day care center, on thermoses in taxicabs and on the uniforms of the local softball league – then it's really starting to make an impact.

3. Be consistent. Branding works best when you use the same colors, the same musical theme, the same company name and the same symbols in all company materials and environments. The store shouldn't be called "O'Reilley's" on T-shirts and "OREilleys" in the newspaper ad.

Sounds obvious, but even powerhouses like IBM have neglected this rule. In the early 1990's, IBM had several hundred different logos and slogans circulating. In mid-1994, it laid down the law on which

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identity elements were authorized and which prohibited. Partly as a result, in 1995 IBM rose to the position of the world's third most valuable brand from position number 282 the year before.

4. Be persistent. Those within a company will be tempted to change the image of a brand way before it's time to do so. Never modify or update a central element of a brand just because you're tired of it. If it's working, it can continue working for decades.

Since the 1880's, Ivory soap has successfully called itself "99 44/100% pure." Marlboro has linked itself with cowboys since the 1950's – and the brand has a current value of around \$13 billion. Betty Crocker has changed her hairstyle, but she's been wearing red and white since her first appearance on food products in 1921.

5. Don't water it down. A brand must stand for something and must be linked with something specific in

the minds of your public. When Packard, which had been America's top luxury-brand car, suddenly announced in the 1940's, "Now everyone can afford a Packard," the company slid into deep trouble. Cadillac picked up buyers who'd previously wanted the cachet of a Packard.

6. Evolve as necessary. Brands may need to mutate when they're perceived as misrepresenting a company that has changed or as out of step with the times. A dramatic example is the updating of Betty Crocker, who lost the original gray flecks in her hair over time and changed from homey-looking to dressed for success to more informally attired as society changed.

With bank mergers now epidemic, it's crucial to try to keep brand equity going. When one bank does not simply swallow the other, designers have come up with elegant new combinations of old identity elements -- one color from company A and one from company B, one syllable from each, a new shape incorporating symbols from both banks, etc.

7. Protect it. Registering a trademark gives you a measure of legal exclusivity on your brand identity, including sometimes even a color scheme, a product's look and feel or an interior decorating scheme. Even so, you may need to police unauthorized usage of your brand elements by searching out offenders and sending cease-and-desist letters. Contact an intellectual property attorney for details.

Don't let your brand name degenerate into a generic term. "Aspirin" used to be a brand name, as did "Escalator." You may feel flattered that people are using your product, service or company name to stand for its entire category, but when that kind of usage becomes widespread it can open the door to competitors having legal license to trade upon the investment you've made in injecting that name into people's minds.

Marcia Yudkin is the author of 6 Steps to Free Publicity and ten other books hailed for outstanding creativity. Find out more about her new discount naming company, Named At Last, which brainstorms new company names, new product names, tag lines and more for cost-conscious organizations, at

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Creating An Unconscious Brand

By Rachelle Disbennett–Lee, MCC, MS

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Branding is a big topic in today's business world. Everywhere we look we can see examples of branding. Just think of companies like McDonald's, Coca Cola, and Toyota. These companies work hard to create and maintain their brand images. Branding is actually somewhat of a recent phenomena in business. It was started back with Proctor and Gamble when they decided to name one of their soaps Ivory. Naming the soap proved to be an excellent idea to the detriment of their other soap products. People stopped buying the generic soaps and began buying Ivory. Because of the success of Ivory, P&G realized the importance of branding and began a branding revolution. Moreover, branding is not just for companies; individuals have their own brands too.

You may not think of yourself as a brand, but you are. Most of us do not work at creating a specific brand like the big name products that we have all come to know and love. But, it doesn't matter. We are creating a brand everyday, consciously or unconsciously. Unfortunately, most of us are creating our brands unconsciously.

Everything we do, say, wear, every expression and even things we don't say and do create a brand. We cannot not communicate our brand because it is part of who we are. We might have a brand as a trustworthy person, or a good friend, or perhaps something not as positive such as someone who is always late. Our brand is communicated everyday by every action we take.

Stop creating an unconscious brand. Your brand is important because it says who you are and what you stand for. It communicates a great deal of information about you and can help or hurt you. Instead of being oblivious to the brand you are creating, begin taking charge of your brand. Your brand lets others know what you stand for, what they can expect from you and what kind of person you are. Make sure it communicates accurately.

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